



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

SEP 4 1998

OFFICE OF  
SOLID WASTE AND EMERGENCY  
RESPONSE

MEMORANDUM

TO: Regional Senior Policy Advisors  
Regions 1-10

FROM: Elizabeth A. Cotsworth, Director  
Office of Solid Waste

RE: Notice of Certification of Alternative Battery Label

EPA has recently published a *Federal Register* Notice announcing approval of a new label that will make it easier for consumers to identify recyclable batteries and to locate the nearest recycling collection sites. More than 20,000 retail outlets nationwide now are collecting recyclable rechargeable batteries that are commonly used in consumer products such as cellular phones, video cameras, power tools and laptop computers. The newly approved label, developed by the Rechargeable Battery Recycling Corp. (RBRC), will be displayed on nickel-cadmium (Ni-Cd) rechargeable batteries in accordance with the Mercury-Containing and Rechargeable Battery Management Act of 1996 (Battery Act).

Regarding Ni-Cd rechargeable battery recycling, EPA Administrator Carol M. Browner said, "These batteries contain cadmium, a heavy metal that can be harmful to public health and the environment if not disposed of properly. Recycling used Ni-Cd batteries prevents cadmium from harming our lakes and streams and polluting the air we all breathe. I congratulate the retail chains participating in this new recycling program and hope others will follow their example."

While cadmium performs critical functions within a Ni-Cd battery and poses no real risks while the battery is in use, it can be of concern when discarded with ordinary household trash. The majority of discarded trash goes to a landfill or incinerator. Heavy metals such as cadmium have a potential to leach from landfills into soil, ground water and surface water. When incinerated, heavy metals enter into the atmosphere through the smokestack and are concentrated in the ash byproduct, which is land filled. Once in the environment heavy metals can move up the food chain. Cadmium can build up in the body as a result of long periods of low exposure, and the body retains cadmium for a long time. Cadmium is a known human carcinogen, and can damage the lungs and cause kidney disease.

The new label, which will appear on batteries by the end of the year, depicts a battery surrounded by three chasing arrows with the word "RECYCLE" above it. The label also includes a consumer contact number (1-800-822-8837), which will provide information to consumers on how and where to recycle their used Ni-Cd batteries. The help line is part of RBRC's national Ni-Cd battery recycling program, *Charge Up to Recycle!*, that enlists retail stores and communities nationwide to serve as collection sites for used batteries. More than 20,000 retail and community locations are participating in the program, including: ACE Hardware, Ameritech, Batteries Plus, BellSouth Cellular, Black & Decker, Car Phone Store, Circuit City, NHD Hardware, RadioShack, Target and Wal-Mart. RBRC is an international, not-for-profit, public service organization that is funded by more than 250 manufacturers and marketers of portable rechargeable batteries and products.

The Battery Act establishes national, uniform labeling requirements for Ni-Cd and certain small sealed lead-acid rechargeable batteries. The new standards encourage recycling and proper handling and disposal of these rechargeable batteries. The law makes the federal Universal Waste Rule immediately effective in all 50 states for the collection, storage and transportation of Ni-Cd and other covered batteries and prohibits, on otherwise conditions, the sale of certain types of mercury-containing batteries such as alkaline-manganese, zinc-carbon, button cell mercuric-oxide and other mercuric-oxide batteries in the United States.

If you have any questions regarding this action, please do not hesitate to call Sue Nogas at 703-308-7251. The *Federal Register* Notice, as well as the booklet *Implementation of the Mercury-Containing and Rechargeable Battery Management Act* is on the Internet at <http://www.epa.gov/epaoswer/osw/non-hw.htm#battery>.

cc: Regional MSW Implementation Team Members